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South Florida Sun Sentinel (Fort Lauderdale, Florida) · Tue, Aug 30, 2005 · Page 47
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TWEEN TRACK

PIED PIPER: Producer-director Stan Rogow on the set of *Darcy's Wild Life* with, from left, Shannon Collis, Andrew Chalmers and Sara Paxton. **New York Times photo**

'I never was a 12-year-old girl,' says producer-director Stan Rogow. Nevertheless, he sure knows what they like.

BY JACQUES STEINBERG
THE NEW YORK TIMES

The script called for a 13-week-old puppy named Sushi to appear to be talking on a cordless phone. But as the television cameras whirred, here on the porch of an old farmhouse in Burlington, Ontario, Sushi was refusing to take the bait, which in this case was a receiver smeared, invisibly, with baby food.

And so the director of the scene, Stan Rogow, took matters into his own paws, as it were.

"There you go, there you go," said Rogow, 55, on his back and just beyond camera range, his hands and legs pantomiming what he wanted his actor, a golden retriever, to do. "Oh my goodness yes, yes. Look at that. Is that a million dollars or what?"

It would be hard to imagine Steven Bochco, Dick Wolf or any other auteur-mogul approaching such a scene in such a way, or even undertaking it at all. But at least on his lucrative parcel of the television landscape — programming for "tweeners," those viewers between ages 9 and 14 — Rogow's standing is comparable to that of his more established, prime-time peers, however much he may have had to adapt his directing style to his material.

Last fall, Rogow — best known as executive producer of the *Lizzie McGuire* franchise on the Disney Channel — launched his second major children's television series, *Darcy's Wild Life*, on Discovery Kids, the cable channel that also supplies the Saturday morning lineup on NBC. The show, about a pampered Hollywood teenager uprooted to a rural town by a mother longing for a simpler life, proved successful enough — drawing an average of 1.6 million viewers on Saturdays, according to Nielsen Media Research — that it is to return for a second season, beginning on Sept. 10 on NBC.

On Oct. 1, Discovery Kids will introduce a second Rogow series to its Saturday morning lineup, this one grittier. Titled *Flight 29 Down*, and created by Rogow and another writer and producer with "tweener" credentials, D.J. MacHale, the series is about a group of teenagers on an extended field trip whose plane crashes on a tropical island. The resulting drama is a cross between *Lost* and *Lord of the Flies*.

Meanwhile, as *Lizzie*, starring Hilary Duff as a clumsy yet soulful adolescent forever struggling to fit in, continues in reruns on Disney Channel, Rogow is working with the network to develop a pilot for a potential spinoff. The show, *Stevie Sanchez*, would follow Lizzie's friend Miranda, played by a young actress known as Lalaine.

And there is more: Like viewers of *Lizzie* —

■ ROGOW CONTINUES ON 2E

Tween Track 1

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South Florida Sun Sentinel (Fort Lauderdale, Florida) · Tue, Aug 30, 2005 · Page 48
Downloaded on Aug 25, 2025

Producer eyeing merchandise deals

ROGOW

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1E

which spun off so much ancillary merchandise that *Fortune* magazine estimated in 2003 that it had earned the Walt Disney Co. nearly $100 million — fans of Rogow's newer shows will soon be able to read books, listen to music and wear clothing inspired by his characters.

All are variations on a formula that Rogow began concocting in earnest in 2000, with the development of *Lizzie*. Each Rogow project is intended to depict young people, especially girls, at a point of hormone-stoked volatility. Each show is supposed to be wholesome enough for children and their parents to watch together — in some scenes, Sara Paxton, the 17-year-old star of *Darcy*, has her T-shirt taped down so as not to reveal her navel — yet compelling in its themes.

Lizzie, for instance, spends one entire episode wrestling with whether she is ready to buy and wear a bra. Darcy, who reluctantly stows her Jimmy Choos to go to work part time for a veterinarian, has to counsel a woman in a forthcoming episode of the necessity of putting her ailing dog to sleep. Darcy is so unsettled by the experience that she picks up the phone to call her own puppy, hence the scene that sent Rogow to the mat, here on a 150-year-old farm outside Toronto where *Darcy* has been taping its second season this summer.

"Depending on the day, you're a teenager who wants to be an adult, but also you want to be a kid," Rogow said, referring to his characters and, he presumes, many in his audience. "I try to speak to these moments of transition."

"I never was a 12-year-old girl," added Rogow, a father of a son, Jackson, who is 11. "I can't actually know what it's like. What I do know are the feelings that we all seem to experience."

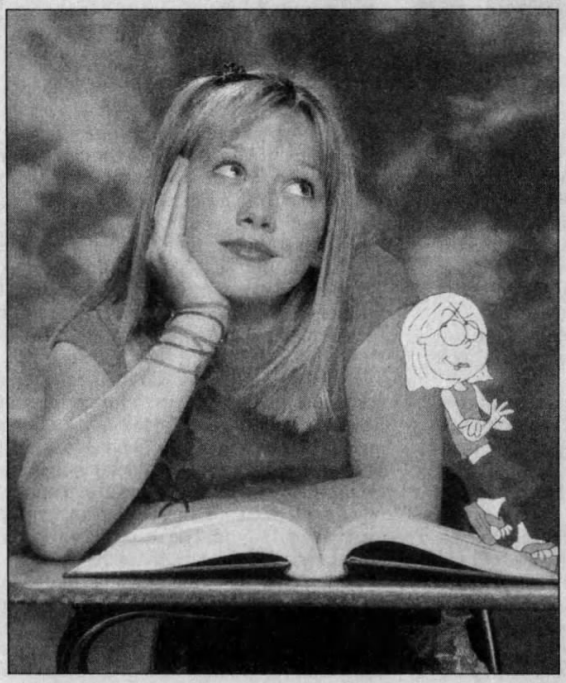
Rogow has a reedy voice, a perpetually stubbly, sunburned face and a slight, 5-foot-11 frame, all of which can camouflage what lies within: a fiercely ambitious producer, writer and director. For all the maturity of his business dealings, though, he is often more comfortable around youths. Upon entering a party where families are present, for example, he invariably makes a beeline for where the young people are sitting, preferably on the floor.

Similarly, as his business associates drone on at meetings, he says he sometimes finds himself wanting to cover his ears and blurt out: la, la, la, la. And he still gets spooked by the flying monkeys in *The Wizard of Oz*.

"He's a great combination of alpha male and puppy," said Marjorie Kaplan, executive vice president and general manager of Discovery Kids, which is available in about 40 million homes. "And being on a phone call with Stan is exactly like that. When he has an idea, he won't let go of it. He's tenacious."

When Rogow made the deal to put *Lizzie* on the Disney Channel, he had little leverage. A trained lawyer who had produced an NBC legal drama (*Shannon's Deal*) and a few Disney movies of the week (including *Rock 'n' Roll Mom* with Dyan Cannon), he was unable to lay much claim to the proceeds of the various subsidiaries Lizzie would spawn. Much of them are controlled by Disney divisions. These include a full-length feature film (2003) that, he said, cost about $17.5 million and grossed more than twice as much, and an accompanying soundtrack that was certified double platinum, meaning it sold at least 2 million copies.

In his business life post-*Lizzie*, Rogow has amassed enough clout to make individual deals for the merchandise associated with his new series. But while Discovery Kids has granted him control over the music and books spun off by *Darcy* and *29 Down*, it cannot match the giant launchpad that the Disney Channel (and the Disney marketing machine) provides. At its peak, *Lizzie* sometimes drew twice as many viewers in a given half-hour as *Darcy* does now, according to Nielsen, though Rogow is banking that *Darcy* can build more of a following.



MONEY MACHINE: Hilary Duff was a tween sensation in *Lizzie McGuire*, about the comic foibles of a 13-year-old. **Disney photo**

"*Lizzie* didn't reach *Lizzie* proportions at this stage, either," he said. In a follow-up e-mail message, he added, "With luck, we're building the better 'mouse.' "

And so, in October, Grosset & Dunlap, an imprint of Penguin Young Readers Group, will publish two books based on *Darcy* episodes, to be followed in 2006 by four more, all of them licensed by Rogow. In the spring, those titles will be joined on bookstore shelves by the first two books in a series based on *29 Down*. So confident is the publisher in Rogow's Midas touch that the jacket of a galley copy of one of those books blares "based on the hit television series!" — no mean feat for a show that has yet to be broadcast.

Two months ago, Sony BMG's Strategic Marketing Group label put out a *Darcy* soundtrack, featuring popular Sony artists like Tiffany Evans and Nicholas Jonas, as well as a single, *Take a Walk*, by Paxton (whose recording career is overseen by Rogow.) Soon, the same label will release a *29 Down* soundtrack, with songs from Bowling for Soup and Duran Duran that will appear on the program.

In a calculated effort to groom Paxton as the next Hilary Duff, Epic, another Sony label, plans to put out her first solo album in the first quarter of next year.

And Rogow does not plan to stop there. He has already told Sony executives that "two or three" of the young stars of *29 Down* are "talented enough where they can carry a note and sing a tune," said Joe DiMuro, executive vice president and general manager for strategic marketing at Sony BMG.

"There's an intangibility factor with Stan," DiMuro said. "It's like having a second father or grandfather, or a favorite uncle who puts his arm around you."

"He may not dress like a surfboarder or skateboarder," DiMuro added. "But he can communicate like one."

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